

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001112

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#) [ZANU](#) [PF](#)

SUBJECT: ATTACK ON MDC PROVINCIAL MEETING

REF: HARARE 1067

Classified By: Political Officer Bianca Menendez for reason 1.5 d

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. ZANU-PF youths on July 2 attacked an MDC provincial assembly attended by several MDC leaders, including Morgan Tsvangirai, in Mashonaland Central. The youths destroyed property and injured MDC supporters. Police blamed the incident on MDC members, while MDC leaders believe the CIO masterminded the attack. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (U) The attack occurred in Mvurwi, at the end of an MDC provincial assembly meeting, according to MDC Secretary General Welshman Ncube. Ncube said at the meeting were party leaders from Harare, some MPs, and party members from around the province. According to MDC spokesman Nkanyiso Maqeda, party members included district and ward representatives and supporters from around the province who came by bus to attend.

¶13. (C) According to MDC Secretary of Mashonaland Central, Shepherd Mushonga, who was at the meeting, two two-ton trucks and two smaller trucks of ZANU-PF youths arrived at the meeting, being held at the property of Biggie Chigonera, MDC Vice Chairman in Mashonaland Central. Mushonga said the youths, who numbered about 150-200, threw stones and attacked people with iron bars then burned down buildings and automobiles on Chigonera's complex, including his residence and a garage.

¶14. (C) Mushonga said that the MDC applied for and received permission from the police to hold the meeting but that the police did not provide guards, as they should have. He said this was an indication that the police knew the attack would happen. He said members of the CIO were visible in the vicinity and that he believed they had probably masterminded the attack.

¶15. (C) According to William Bango, personal assistant to Morgan Tsvangirai, local ZANU-PF elements are trying to locate citizens who were at the meeting. Maqeda said he heard that two trucks of youths were driving around the province Sunday looking for meeting attendees and threatening them. Mushonga said that ZANU-PF youths were also threatening Chigonera, who was still at his property where the youths were demonstrating and chanting outside his home. Mushonga said the police have done nothing to investigate the attack.

¶16. (U) According to the government-controlled Herald newspaper, police spokesman Mandipaka said MDC youths provoked ZANU-PF youths by throwing tear gas at them as a ZANU-PF youth convoy approached the meeting, characterized by the Herald as an MDC rally. According to the Herald, police denied anyone was injured.

¶17. (C) Ncube said that all the Harare party leaders, including Morgan Tsvangirai, were unharmed and returned safely to Harare. Maqeda said that there were five confirmed injured, including Samuel Mapingure, the driver of Chitungwiza MP Fidelis Mhashu. Maqeda said the MDC believed many others had been injured but that they were among those who had come by bus from the countryside and that they had all fled after the attack.

¶18. (C) COMMENT: This incident is another example of a long-standing pattern of the GOZ preventing the MDC from holding meetings and rallies, particularly in rural areas regarded by the ruling party as its base. (Mvurwi is a small town in the midst of a former commercial farming area.) Government officials allowed the meeting to be planned and held, perhaps in an attempt to identify supporters, then sponsored or at a minimum allowed an attack on the event. Continued GOZ suppression of opposition campaign efforts and freedom of assembly offers context for ongoing ruling party efforts to initiate electoral reforms (reftel): such efforts will revolve around changes in the letter of the law, but do little if anything to address deep imbalances in Zimbabwe's election environment.

19. (C) COMMENT (CONT'D): The incident nonetheless represents a potentially morale-boosting victory of sorts for the MDC in the battle for hearts and minds in the run-up to national parliamentary elections scheduled for March. The clash in ZANU-PF's heartland will raise a question in even the most uncritical readers of the official press's stilted accounts: how could the MDC have been holding a provincial assembly meeting in a zone regarded by most Zimbabweans as a ruling party-enforced "no-go" area -- one in which the opposition lacked any meaningful presence?

SULLIVAN